



Basia Zarzycka



If life is a fairy tale, then legendary designer Basia Zarzycka is weaving her own enchanted, vibrant, color-filled story, each chapter more beautiful than the last and bursting at the seams with handmade exquisite visual wonders. Basia's alchemy is a feast for the senses. It is a complete celebration of the entirety of the natural world at its most romantic and eccentric. Magic follows and flows from within her. It is represented in everything she touches and more than evident in the intricate, laborious detail of each and every item she creates. All who are lucky enough to see her work in person within the walls of her ethereal shop located in Sloane Square, London, are forever changed. As Basia explains, "Magic is real. You can't live without some magic in your life, now can you? Everybody needs a little magic!"



“Style is knowing who you are, what you want to say, and not giving a damn.”
— Orson Wells



My parents are from Poland; I was born the U.K. in Birmingham, which is in the Midlands. I am a Polish Brummie! Polish is my first language, and a lot of my inspiration comes from our folklore and Polish traditions. My parents created a colorful life for me. I was encouraged from a very early age to keep sketchbooks full of colorful collages and draw as opposed to write. When I was a child I also read a lot of fairy tales; I do believe in magic. I always knew I would be an artist. I used to make my dolls clothes out of fresh flower petals I'd plucked from my mother's garden. As I got older, I knew that I wanted this as a way of life — that “making” was what I wanted to do for a living. I've never done it for the money or the fame. I do it because I love it.

When I was 16, I told my parents I wanted to go to art school and they fully supported me. I attended two years of foundation courses in Birmingham, specializing in cloth, where I was taught how to weave and spin, and I won Woolmark of the Year, which is first prize for the whole of Great Britain. I attended Goldsmiths University of London and studied embroidery and textiles for three years. I attained a bachelor's degree with honors, and then went on to Birmingham to earn my masters in constructed textiles and fashion. I enjoyed every aspect of art but was gently guided toward fashion. All my lecturers were practicing artists and greatly encouraged me to take the path I have chosen. ➤





"I can work anywhere, so I always carry an ironing board with me wherever I go to use as a portable desk. I create some of my best work on it and it's my best buddy."



I started my business as a little stall in the Bermondsey Antique Market in London nearly 30 years ago. I was absolutely astonished when a Japanese buyer came along and placed an order for £300,000 (approximately \$460,000)! That was my stepping stone to opening my shop on King's Road in Chelsea. My shop has been in Sloane Square for 19 years now. Making beautiful, fanciful things is my great passion. I love to create something wonderful out of broken bits of this and that, my focus always being on something decorative that can be worn and adorning the body. I love creating clothing that celebrates life, like weddings, christenings, and Bar Mitzvahs. I don't really do "day wear."

My shop is overflowing with jewelry, tiaras, shoes, hats, dresses, masks, scarves, and handbags; the entire shop is an art installation. There are no cabinets or cases with things guarded under glass; everything is displayed in a way so people can come in, touch, and pick things up. We have scented candles burning every day and soothing ethereal music playing in the background so all the senses are reached. There are two studios in my shop; I make jewelry on the left side, and do everything else on the right side. But I can work anywhere, so I always carry an ironing board with me wherever I go to use as a portable desk. I create some of my best work on it and it's my best buddy.

Someone recently wrote to me on Facebook and asked where on earth does all my energy come from? I really couldn't say, except for the fact that I am totally besotted and in love with art and creating beautiful things. I am fortunate never to suffer from creative blocks. I work on many different projects at the same time. I'm always making at least 20 different things simultaneously. Each project flows into the other and attaches themselves to one another. ➤





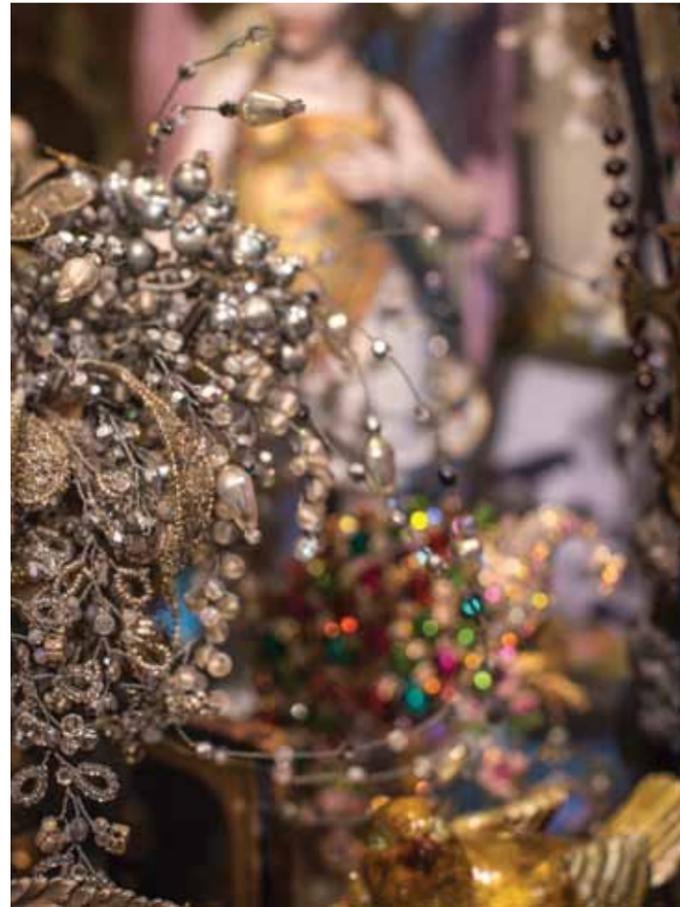
I reuse lots of antique and vintage materials and supplies. I am not part of the throwaway society. I make my pieces to the highest standard of craftsmanship one can achieve, and every piece to be timeless and devoid of fashion trends. I consider myself an artist before a fashion designer. Anything that I do, I have to give it my all. I have many disciplines within me, and I work through intuition. Materials are very important to me. I love searching for natural wonders like peacock feathers, pearls, gemstones, leather, fur, wool, and silk. I have a special affinity for antique laces, beads, and other old objects, and spend lots of time in the flea markets of London, France, and Belgium. I also make use of paper, glass, metal, and especially vintage and Victorian buttons.

I get asked to make the most unusual things: Once a gentleman commissioned me to make a replica handbag of his wife's dog. He brought me photographs and actual hair clippings to match the color of her poodle. People always ask if the cat and dog handbags I create are real stuffed cats and dogs — of course they are not, but I find it funny! I was also asked to make a tiara for a live swan, which was a bit tricky. I've had the pleasure of making shoes for Elton John and corsets for the Three Sopranos for their world tour with Placido Domingo, Jose Carreras, and Luciano Pavarotti. I've also made wedding dresses for the royal families of Dubai and Abu Dhabi. One of the most expensive dresses I've ever made cost £85,000 and weighed 42 kilos. We had to devise a way for the dress's 10-meter train to move along with the woman, as it was getting stuck on the carpet because of all the silver Swarovski jewels. We had little wheels made that carried it along the plush, thick woven carpets as well as the marble floors. ➤



My most-cherished item in the studio is an antique sewing machine I was awarded by Cadbury's Chocolate for Breast Cancer charity work. It means a lot to me, as I am presently in remission myself after being diagnosed with breast cancer.

To be successful,
you must believe
in creating beauty.
Do not do it for
money or fame, as
those will come if
you are brilliant at
what you do.



I now teach classes on the Swan Hellenic cruiseline called Minerva for six months out of the year. I teach people how to make flowers and button jewelry, and also run fashion workshops. The cruise classes have been very successful and I thoroughly enjoy them! I am also in the process of acquiring a chateau in the South of France. It will be a school where people can come and work with me. I really want to pass my knowledge along. We'll go on shopping trips to flea markets and then return to the chateau to create. I'm so excited about this venture because it will also allow me to display the many items I've collected, which have been archived in storage. I plan on decorating the chateau with it all, so I am totally surrounded by the things I love!

If I can offer one piece of advice it would be to believe in your dreams, and to go forward living every day trying to reach them. You must believe in yourself as an artist. It can be hard at times, but it's worth it. My work is my best friend — it's always been there for me. I feel so fortunate to have been allowed to live and breathe what I do, and I couldn't even imagine doing anything else. It's been fantastic to make a living for the past 30 years creating beautiful things that people can wear and treasure.

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WHERE WOMEN CREATE would like to thank Basia Zarzycka for her involvement in our summer issue. To learn more, visit basiazarzycka.com, basiashop.com, and Facebook ([basia.zarzycka](https://www.facebook.com/basia.zarzycka)).

